

the palace by hoppnhorn

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Summary:

“Kyle, I swear to *god*.” He snaps, finally, because the problem wasn’t going to just *go away* like he had really *really* wished it would.

“Keith.”

“I don’t fucking *care*. Get lost.” Thank god the place lets him smoke on the job because standing around the arcade with all the noise is just a *nightmare*.

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He's really not in the mood. *Really* not in the mood. But he's also fucking *broke* so it's not like he has much of a choice.

Not if he wants to like, *live* for the next two weeks.

Because he's convinced if he quit smoking, he'd probably die. Either that or start picking the butts out of the trash like some kind of hobo and like, he really can't ride that vibe.

That's a whole lot of desperation, even in Hawkins.

And Billy is seven sorts of desperate to get the fuck *out* but he can't do that if he doesn't save money. Then there's the issue of money not growing on *trees* so.

Here he is, not in the mood.

While his mouth-breather of a coworker just *gapes* at him.

"Kyle, I swear to *god*." He snaps, finally, because the problem wasn't going to just *go away* like he had really *really* wished it would.

"Keith."

"I don't fucking *care*. Get lost." Thank god the place lets him smoke on the job because standing around the arcade with all the noise is just a *nightmare*.

Let alone freaking *Keith*, always watching. Waiting. For what, Billy's not sure. Probably for him to explode like a hand grenade. His temper isn't exactly a *secret*. That's part of his reputation, that he's loud, crazy and, honestly, *dangerous*.

Most people saw Harrington's face so his delight in *violence* spread like wildfire. Even though he really doesn't remember most of that night. It's like, he can't even relive the event that has everyone eyeballing him on the street. All because his kid sister decided to stick him like a pin cushion.

Fucking *Max*.

He remembers that part. Remembers her standing over him, screaming.

“*SAY IT!*”

“The asshole kid is back again.” Keith murmurs nearby, because he hadn’t actually *listened* and gone away. No, he’d just taken a couple of steps to the right like suddenly Billy couldn’t see him anymore. Like he’s a T-Rex.

Hold still, and he’ll forget you’re there.

No one could forget Keith is around. He’s always fucking *crunching* on something. Today it’s fucking *Bugles* and Billy is tempted to just grab the bag and crush them all to dust.

Maybe dump them all on the carpet and make Keith vacuum the shit up.

That’d be the most entertaining thing to happen in fucking *hours*.

“And I care *why*?” He growls, pulling hard in his smoke to try and drown out the tickle of rage in his blood. Keith chews for a moment, staring.

He’s really *not* in the mood.

But he was hired by old man Collins to keep assholes from fucking up his games. The things are apparently expensive and worth paying someone to kick the snot out of idiots who get too rough with them.

Or rough up the smaller kids that spend every quarter that crosses their path in the place.

Protect the dweebs. That is *actually* his job description.

“Fucking christ.” He eventually mutters when Keith takes a particularly long crunch, putting his butt out on the comic book lying on the counter. Keith’s shriek of outrage makes him *smile*.

It's one of the usuals Billy realizes as he rounds a corner and spies Tony. Troy. Todd.

Whatever.

He's kicking a machine in outrage while simultaneously slamming his fist into the controls. All with his dumb little crony watching on.

Billy really should just crack their heads together and call it a day. Nothing a little brain damage can't fix, right?

"Hey." He yells over the hustle and noise and the kid looks over, sees him coming, and puts on a glare. It's *cute*, how the little twerp thinks Billy can't snap him in half if he wanted to, if he was put in just the right mood.

"What do *you* want?" The kid sasses him and his friend half-heartedly laughs. His friend is the smarter of the two, Billy remembers. He's the one who eyes the exit, knows that he should bolt when Billy goes for his pal.

Smart.

"Cute." Billy snarls, chewing up the distance between them with his strong stride. He's not *tall* but hell if he's not *fast*. "Come 'ere, asshole."

And, like he figured, the other kid runs like a scared rabbit. But Billy doesn't fall for the distraction, he lashes out to snag the mouthy one, hauling him up by the collar of his shirt. Usually, he just escorts them out to the parking lot, shoves them a little and tells them to get lost.

But he's finally *in the mood*.

To to *hurt* something.

"Hey hey hey." A voice interrupts his thoughts as he pulls the kid in his grasp so close he can count the pimples on his nose. He doesn't have to look.

He'd know Harrington's voice anywhere.

“Troy, get the fuck out of here before Billy rips your arms off, huh?” Steve says, placating. Like a good little mommy. Billy lets the rage in his blood seep into his stare, clamps down on his jaw. He lets it out. Really lets the crazy shine, until he’s sure the kid is going to piss himself.

“Seriously.” Steve adds, a bit of a whisper. “I wouldn’t come back.”

Weird that Harrington isn’t talking Billy down. He’s tried before. This time it’s like Steve knows what he’s dealing with.

He’s stared into Billy’s stormy gaze and survived.

Billy drops Troy unceremoniously, and the kid winds up falling onto his ass instead of landing on his feet. Which, honestly, *good*. It makes his scramble for the door all the more satisfying.

Billy swears he can almost smell pee.

“I didn’t need your help.” He says, still without looking at Harrington. He hadn’t even noticed the guy had shown up, but then again, Harrington has a way of just being in the right place at the wrong time.

Or right.

Maybe.

“I know *you* didn’t.” Steve counters. There’s a swish of a windbreaker and Billy catches a whiff of his cologne. It’s subtle, just like Steve’s hair nowadays. He doesn’t quite peacock like he used to, now that there isn’t a high school pecking order. “Figured you’d probably get fired if you hurt him though.”

There it is.

Mommy Steve.

“Oh no. That’d be tragic.”

Crunch.

Billy *does* turn his head to glare at Keith, his rage bubbling up again at breakneck speed.

“Someone talking to you?” He snarls. Maybe almost *yells*. And Keith scuttles off while kids turn to look.

“At least you don’t have to wear a sailor outfit.”

It’s unavoidable at that point. Billy turns, finally looking at Harrington where he stands nearby, arms crossed.

With a *sailor hat* on his head. And the anger in Billy’s belly is cut off at the knees. He snorts, his face going loose as he raises one eyebrow.

“What the *fuck*, Harrington?”

“Scoops Ahoy at the mall.” He says, shrugging his shoulders. “It was the only place that called me back.”

And, like, Billy almost feels bad for him.

“You look like a fucking idiot.” He scoffs. At least all the arcade makes him wear is a t-shirt with the logo. He still wears his denim jacket, his jeans.

Steve’s wearing fucking *shorts*.

“There you are!” A voice exclaims and Billy almost groans as a mop of curly hair appears in his peripherals. “What happened to getting *pizza*, Steve?”

Henderson. One of the idiots his sister runs around with. One of Harrington’s ducklings.

He grimaces and unceremoniously strolls away, aware that he’d left Steve standing there without saying goodbye. Which, is par for the course with him, if he’s being honest.

But sometimes he wishes he wasn’t *like* that.

Not with Steve anyway.

“Why would you talk to *him*?” He hears Henderson ask as he struts away. But he’s not straining to hear Steve’s reply over the machines.

He’s *not*.

“Because someone should.” Steve says and Billy stares down at the floor as blood rushes to his ears.

Then, of course, he’s very *not alone*.

“You owe me a new comic, dude.” Keith is just suddenly *there* and Billy startles a little.

“God are you still *here*?” He growls, pulling a fresh cigarette out of his pocket, popping it in his lips. He catches a glimpse of that dumb sailor hat at the door, heading out into the night. For a second, he wants to follow.

Wants to *try*. Wants to earn Steve’s words.

“I *work* here.” Keith drones. *Crunch*.

Billy finds the idiot’s eye and holds it, lights his cigarette and takes a long drag. These little acts of defiance never actually *last* and, like usual, Keith is the one to scuttle away.

Just soon enough for Billy to catch BMW headlights leave the lot.